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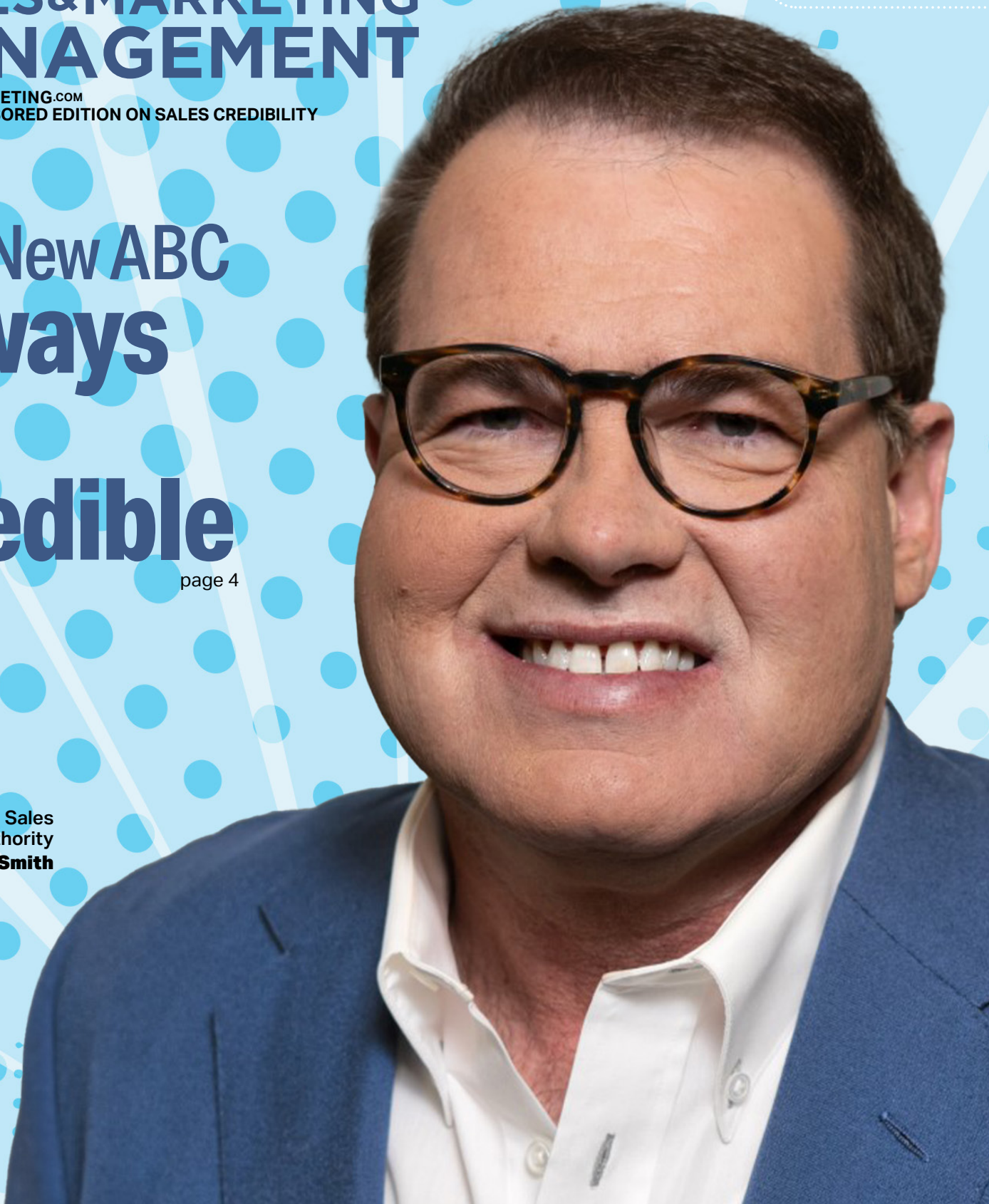
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The New ABC Always Be Credible

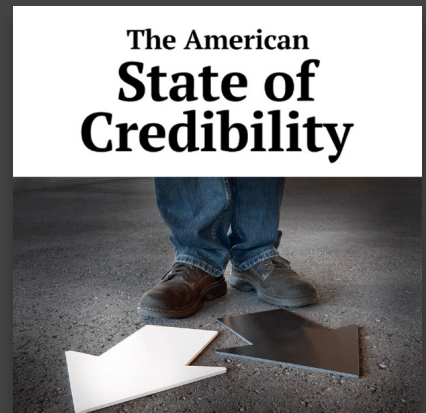
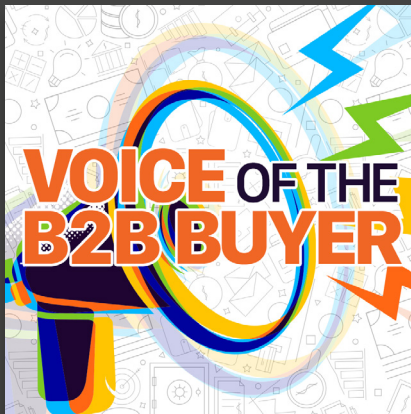
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Global Sales
Credibility Authority
C. Lee Smith



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{from the editor}

Got Credibility? Shout It Out!

New presidential administrations are customarily assessed after the first 100 days.

New hires frequently have 90 days on the job before a review.

In B2B sales, those sort of time frames can seem luxurious. Complex sales may take more than a year to close, but buyers are continuously assessing suppliers for their knowledge, how well they understand the prospect's unique needs, and, most of all, their credibility.

The most successful business relationships rely on trust, and trust is built through honesty, transparency and credibility.

But those three words are easy to fly past. Whether you lead a sales team or you're just starting out on one, honesty, transparency and credibility can feel like table stakes for sales professionals. In truth, says C. Lee Smith, CEO of SalesFuel, a sales intelligence and enablement firm, these traits are not given nearly enough attention by most sales teams' go-to-market strategies.

As Lee explains, sales professionals focus on qualifying prospects and too often fail to realize that the prospects are qualifying them. In some instances, sales professionals may recognize the importance of establishing credibility, but aren't sure how to intentionally do it – and how to call it out once they've done it.

That last part is important. Lee's Hierarchy of Sales Credibility pyramid includes some expected methods of establishing trust – what you say and what you do. At the top of the pyramid, however, is something that many in sales either don't consider or fail to take full advantage of – what others say about you. More than one-quarter of buyers from small and medium-sized businesses say that a testimonial from a satisfied customer can influence their buying decision as long as it's credible.

If you lead a team of sales professionals who have established trust among a broad customer base by walking the talk of being true business partners, then your new prospects need to know about it. Client testimonials should be all over your website, including on your home page.

If you don't have a hefty inventory of current customers singing your praises, ask yourself why not? The information in this report is a great start to helping your team establish credibility, delight customers and to gather more customer referrals than you could ever imagine.



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The New ABC Always Be Credible

BY PAUL NOLAN

A report from CSO states that 77% of buyers don't see salespeople as a helpful resource to solve their business problems.

Gartner research shows that when B2B buyers are considering a purchase, they spend less than 20% of their time meeting with potential suppliers.

Harvard Business Review reports that a survey of nearly 1,000 B2B buyers revealed that 43% of respondents agreed they would prefer a rep-free buying experience.

How did it come to this? When, exactly, and how did professional salespeople become persona non grata?

The timing of it is fuzzy (and probably not all that important). The cause is more evident, says C. Lee Smith, CEO of SalesFuel, a sales intelligence and enablement firm. In a word, it's credibility – or more accurately, lack of credibility.

“In B2B sales, salespeople have a driving need to be seen as trusted advisors. You can't earn trust unless you are first perceived as having a high degree of credibility,” Smith said in an interview with Sales & Marketing Management.

Who's Qualifying Whom?

Sales professionals have long talked about qualifying the buyer. Sellers don't want to waste time on a prospect who doesn't have purchase decision power, lacks the proper budget, or who doesn't fit an ideal customer persona.

Smith says this is backward. Sellers would be better off being mindful of how buyers are qualifying – or disqualifying – them. How a buyer perceives the seller has significantly more impact on whether a sale is made than how the seller perceives the buyer. Qualified buyers are more likely to meet with sellers who have a reputation for solving customers' problems and improving their business results.

Such a reputation is how sales credibility – “SalesCred” as Smith refers to it – is built. That seems intuitive, yet Smith says a majority of salespeople don't get a chance to establish credibility because they insist on talking about themselves, their company, and their products or services. It's also because our industry's worst practitioners have caused only a quarter of Americans to

view salespeople as credible. So we pay for past sins of others and start most of our new relationships from a position of weakness and subservience.

The Hierarchy of Sales Credibility

To help sales professionals develop the sort of credibility that opens prospects' doors, Smith developed what he calls the Hierarchy of Sales Credibility. It's a pyramid whose foundation is the information that exists online about the individual seller, and progresses to what you say, how you say it and what you do. The top of the pyramid is what others say about you – referrals, testimonials and reviews.



“To get to the decision-makers that you need to get to, they need to know that you're not going to waste their time. What you say must be relevant to people,” Smith says. “Providing value requires knowing what the prospect feels is most important.”

Credible salespeople have high levels of business acumen, humanity and empathy for others. For all the talk about artificial intelligence (AI) and other technology replacing salespeople, a fundamental truth is that humans' empathy along with the ability to connect and build trust are essential to selling and cannot be replaced by technology.

Let's look more closely at the five levels of establishing credibility and the steps you can take to enhance your standing at each level.

What the Internet Says About You

Keep in mind, while you are researching your prospects, they are researching you. What people can discover about you online is the first level of establishing credibility. Smith says it's a level that is often overlooked by sales professionals.

“You’ve heard that you don’t have a second chance to make a first impression. These days, you don’t even get to make your first impression; Google and LinkedIn do,” says Smith.

Nearly six in 10 decision-makers polled by SalesFuel (59%) at small-to-midsize companies say they research the salesperson’s LinkedIn profile, job history and social media posts and do a



Google search on them before they will meet with the salesperson. The larger the customer, the more likely this is to be true.

Salespeople need to continually monitor their online presence. Sales managers need to help their team members understand the importance of how they come across online. “In one sense, it’s out of your control, but in another, it’s something you can definitely influence and build,” Smith says.

Steps he recommends:

Quality head shots – Make sure the photo that accompanies a LinkedIn profile and other social media is current and professional.

Be connected – How many LinkedIn connections do you have? You’re more credible if hundreds of people find benefit in being connected with you.

“Your profile should speak to your prospects, not your next manager. A lot of LinkedIn profiles are written for a person’s next employer,” Smith says. Use keywords in headlines and your profile that speak to your top prospects. Tell your story about how you can help solve their business challenges.

Get published – If you want to be seen as a credible, reliable source of information, you need to get credible information with your name on it online. This can be a blog post, contributed articles on a third-party site or your own LinkedIn page. Short video tutorials work well also.

Respond to criticism – If you have a negative review or harm was caused by content you created, create a sincere apology, then make several posts that show your enlightened way of thinking.

What You Say

Once your online credibility is established, saying the right things – in emails, telephone conversations, video calls and other means of communication – will get you in the door. Saying the right things requires completing the footwork that’s necessary to understand the prospect’s challenges and addressing topics that are important to them.

The question that kills a salesperson’s credibility the fastest is, “Tell me about your business.” Credible salespeople already know about a prospect’s business and have ideas on how they can help it. In a courtroom, lawyers avoid asking questions they don’t already know the answer to. In sales, it’s the opposite.

Ask yourself if the talking points about your company and your products or services will add relevance to the solutions a prospect is seeking. More often than not, sharing primary or secondary research will go further to establishing credibility than running through product features.

“If what you say is not relevant to the buyer, it’s not relevant,” Smith says. “Relevant value is what’s important to the buyer, the buyer’s boss and their customers.”

The information learned by asking good questions provides the leverage necessary to build great solutions, overcome objections and close a sale.



The customer's problem, or ambition, is the compass that salespeople use for showing up as credible when interacting with prospects.



How You Say It

How a salesperson communicates can further establish credibility or help destroy it. Showing confidence is paramount, as is matching the level of professionalism of the prospect. Don't be too casual, use slang or assume a level of friendship that may not exist.

At the same time, being too formal or using too much "marketing speak" will result in a feeling that your messages are one-size-fits-all. Tailor each message to the person who is receiving it. Be human. Here again, show them that you understand their priorities.

Emails should be brief and to the point. Complex conversations should not be held via email. And keep in mind whether you are emailing, calling or meeting in person with a prospect, less can be more.

What You Do

Credibility is only established when words are backed up by actions. Better to lose a sale than to make promises you can't deliver on, Smith says.

"Outcomes lead to income. The best way to build credibility and get repeat sales is to produce positive outcomes."

Building credibility through what you do centers around honesty, congruency and authenticity. If the names on a proposed contract were reversed and you were in the buyer's position, it must still look like a good business deal. If it doesn't why do you expect the buyer to sign it?

Smith adheres to the philosophy of under promising and over delivering. If you have the opportunity to surprise and delight a client, do it. It's worth the extra effort and one of the most surefire ways to establish credibility through what you do.

What They Say

What matters most is what your customers say about you, your company and your products or services. Smith quotes author and speaker Jeffrey Gitomer as saying, "When you say things about yourself, it's bragging; when someone else says it about you, it's proof."

"Most salespeople have big egos, too much bravado and do a lot of bragging without a lot of proof. You stand out from the pack by having others do the talking for you in the form of referrals, testimonials, introductions, positive reviews and success stories," Smith adds.

More than one-quarter of buyers from small and medium-sized businesses say that a testimonial from a satisfied customer can influence their buying decision as long as it's credible.

Sales managers must work with salespeople to make them "superconnectors." The proper mindset for getting referrals is to give them. Introducing your customers to other people that can boost their business establishes you as a business partner and increases your credibility.



Credibility Must Be Maintained

Credibility, once earned, isn't guaranteed to last forever. In fact, it can be lost in a flash.

You've no doubt heard the expression "people do business with people they know, like and trust." Building credibility requires ongoing commitment to being known, being likable, being trustworthy – and just as importantly – being helpful.

Sales managers can help their team members establish credibility by reviewing these steps and helping them adhere to them.

"Some people mistakenly believe that credibility is the same as personal branding. Personal branding is how you want to be seen; credibility is how you actually are seen," Smith says. "You have a different level of credibility with each account you serve."

"And your credibility is worth much more than any sale. Never compromise your principles, even if a competitor is doing it," he adds. "You'll feel great about the deals you've won and you'll win friends, which leads to even more sales."

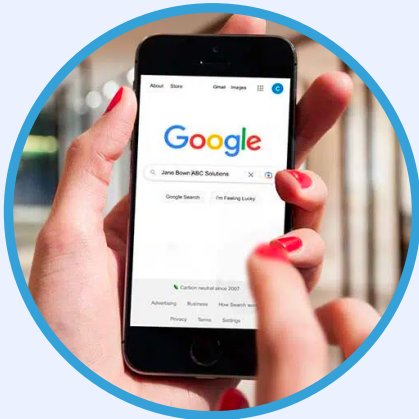
"The customer's problem, or ambition, is the compass that salespeople use for showing up as credible when interacting with prospects."



C. Lee Smith,
Founder and CEO
of SalesFuel



Without Credibility, EVERY Sales Process Fails.



Digital Credibility

How High-Value Prospects
See You Before They'll See You



Selling with Insight

How to Use the Latest Research
to Lead Sales Conversations



Selling with AI and EQ

How to Build Credibility with both
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What Buyers Want From Sellers

BY KATHY CROSETT, VICE PRESIDENT OF RESEARCH, SALESFUEL

Are your prospects ignoring your calls and email messages? That's not unusual. To attract their attention, consider the situation from their perspective. In a buying situation, most prospects want the answer to a key question: What's in it for them?

It's up to you to show how your solution will solve their current problem. And you must build enough trust to convince them that buying from you won't be a career-ending decision. But before you can deliver on their wants and needs, you have some work to do.

Building Credibility

Results from our [Voice of the Buyer survey](#) show that 53% of buyers initially try to solve a business problem on their own. Their second most popular action (46%) is to discuss the issue with a current supplier. Makes sense, doesn't it? They reach out to a known and trusted advisor.

When these avenues fail to deliver a solution, your opportunity begins. As soon as a buyer begins their online discovery process, you have a chance to be noticed. Whether it's the need for expert engineering services or a widget to improve the efficiency of their floor cleaning robot, buyers look for links to online research and opinions offered by thought leaders.



The Definitive Book on Sales Credibility

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You can build credibility and appeal to buyers by listing the kind of information that matters as they evaluate sellers, corporate websites and background reports. When evaluating a provider, buyers pay close attention to:

- Companies with great customer service 36%
- Locally owned businesses 36%
- Product costs on websites 28%

Work with your in-house experts to ensure that your website displays the data points buyers want to see.

Sales Professionalism

Buyers will also be checking out your personal credibility long before they reach out. Your years of overall experience matters to 49% of buyers. Another 46% want to know your industry-specific experience. Keep in mind that for younger buyers, educational background is the second most important factor after years of experience. They're also far more likely to check your LinkedIn profile than older buyers.

You may not be a fan of using the latest technology to maintain your online presence. However, 23% of younger buyers review videos posted on social media by sales professionals. Their regular online browsing habits should be your reminder to routinely update your profile.

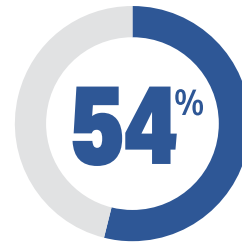
Other aspects of your online persona can impact your credibility. Because everything about everybody appears online today, buyers will take advantage of information they can find. Posts showing your participation in an important cause that most people support, such as feeding the hungry, can position you as a caring person. But 44% of potential buyers will cancel you if they find evidence of your illegal drug use. Use a reputation management service to clean up your image.



How to Reach Out

If you're fortunate enough to attract the attention of a prospect through your online efforts, such as responding to their comments, it's time to connect. Your initial outreach might be through a site like LinkedIn, but 35% of buyers prefer email interaction with sales professionals.

This doesn't mean they never want to see you in person. You'll need to earn that opportunity, and you can do so by improving on the credibility you built when you first attracted their attention.



54%
of buyers want to know if you can provide relevant insights and ideas

What to Say

It might be tempting to open your conversations by mentioning the college you both attended. Keep that angle brief. Focus on what matters to buyers: 52% want you to know how to use your products to solve their problems. If you can provide relevant insights and ideas, you'll score attention from 54% of buyers.

Remember that when buyers first meet with a seller, they have two objectives: to discuss their goals (23%) and to clarify what they can achieve by using your product (18%). Don't walk away from your first talk with your prospect until you've addressed these topics.

Buyers are looking for great solutions from credible sales reps who they can trust. When you take the time to build your online reputation and focus on solving their problems, they'll respond to your outreach.



Kathy Crosett is the Vice President of Research for SalesFuel. She holds an MBA from the University of Vermont and oversees a staff of researchers, writers and content providers for SalesFuel. Previously, she was co-owner of several small businesses in the health care services sector.



6 Tips to Build a Strong Online Presence

BY RON ROBBINS, CEO + FOUNDER, CLICTA DIGITAL

Building a solid online presence is not just for businesses. It's a must for every online community member, whether you're a business owner, social media influencer, marketer, or freelancer. With a well-curated professional profile, you can make yourself more visible in the job market, win customers for your business, and even attract partnership opportunities.

One's visibility online refers to how easy it is to find a brand or individual in the virtual world. It's essential to help establish a positive reputation, enhance brand awareness, and maintain your presence when people search for you using specific keywords. It matters because this is how you can achieve your purpose and hit your goals.

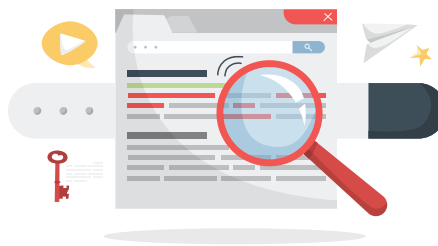
Online Visibility: Why Does It Matter?

The Harris Poll survey revealed that hiring managers agree that social media is an effective tool for screening applicants. Similarly, Oberlo shows that 81% of consumers research online before purchasing.

What do these numbers suggest? They mean that whether you're online applying for a job, selling a product or service, or looking for clients, how you're perceived in the digital space matters.

Top 6 Tips to Build a Solid Professional Presence Online

Don't wait for opportunities and clients to find you. Put yourself out there and increase your online presence with these winning tips.



1. Make Use of SEO to Rank Nationally

SEO will always be a helpful tool to get your resume and professional profile into the hands of people who need your services.

However, since Google ranks local pages first, you must learn to break out of the local search results to widen your reach. Pick a few cities where you want to establish a professional presence and look up your competitors.

Be visible online by knowing and understanding what your competitors can and can't offer. Position yourself as someone who can fill in the gap between your prospective client's needs and what the competition can't provide. Regionalize your offerings and take into account your prospective client's preferences.

Once you've determined these, it's time to start your keyword research. Spend time figuring out national SEO keywords to help you beat your competitors. Incorporate these keywords in your professional profile, portfolio, and social media pages.

Conclude your SEO and online presence management efforts by building backlinks through guest posting. Contact reputable blog sites and offer to write niche-related content that will backlink to your professional website and social media pages.

2. Utilize Industry-Specific Websites and Blogs

Your goal when building a strong presence online is to make money. However, you must create value for your prospective clients before you can do that. One way of doing this is by providing free educational online content. It will not only add value to your clients, but it's also a way of establishing a positive online reputation as an individual practitioner.

Post this content on industry-specific websites and generate backlinks to your landing page or professional website. Get started by listing your client's motivations and pain points. Better yet, learn and understand their buyer persona.

Afterward, figure out what kind of content could best address their concerns. What specific information can help them? The answer to this will be the basis of your content strategy.

You can also create value for your prospective clients by offering advice. Increase your online visibility by appearing on a podcast, responding to an online comment, or writing a guest post. When your prospective clients have questions, be sure to answer them sufficiently.



3. Leverage Syndicated Content

Content syndication refers to repurposing old content and publishing it on different websites. Publications love syndicated content because it offers new information to their readers. As the original author, you benefit from this practice by getting your content in front of a new audience. You can use tools like Outbrain or Taboola to simplify building an online presence through syndicated content. Since this type of content is considered duplicate, you must execute the syndicating process cautiously. Otherwise, Google might penalize you. Here are the best practices you can follow.

Work with high-ranking websites: If you plan to repurpose your old content, ensure that you repost it on a high-ranking and popular website to broaden your reach.

Figure out the best way to syndicate content: When improving online visibility, it's advisable to syndicate the blog post or article to a third-party site. Other times, it's better to syndicate the headline with backlinks to your site. It depends on the content type, audience and website. Add links to your landing page and a compelling call-to-action when appropriate and feasible to increase conversions.

Come up with a strategy: Start with high-quality content. After that, you must set a clear business goal, identify syndication partners, curate winning pitches, and finalize your content syndication plan.

4. Develop a Digital PR strategy

This strategy is a comprehensive plan that a PR agency must execute to achieve the strategy's objectives. In this case, the aim would be to build a strong presence online to reach prospective clients. Here are some ways to create a successful PR strategy.

Know your audience: It's best to conduct competitor research to know your competitor's audience. Next, start mapping out their buyer personas.



Curate the right content: Part of a thorough digital PR strategy is content marketing. Now that you know your target audience, it's time to think of content that will pique their interest and engage them.

Creating a pitch and media list: Know who you want to cover your story and pitch your story to them.

Be a subject matter expert: Continue building credibility by positioning yourself as a niche authority.

5. Actively Engage in Social Media

You can also improve your online presence with the help of nano-influencers.

Nano-influencers are social media influencers with [fewer than 10,000 followers who are considered the most effective influencers](#) because they authentically engage with their followers.

These are build lasting follower relationships by commenting and responding to messages more often than other prominent influencers.

Apply the same principles when dealing with your prospective clients. If you answer their queries and respond to their messages online, you position yourself as responsive, accessible and trustworthy.

All these traits can help support the positive reputation you're building online.

6. Build and Enhance Your Website

The best way to establish your online presence is to have a professional website that showcases your services and skills. Before you build your website, you must develop your personal brand. Choose a color palette and design that resonate with your professional brand.

Study how to play with color and photo elements to build a website that represents you. Apart from that, you can also improve your online visibility by adding your portfolio. If you're a web designer, your portfolio could be the websites you've worked on. If you're a content creator, add the best content you've created to boost your credibility.

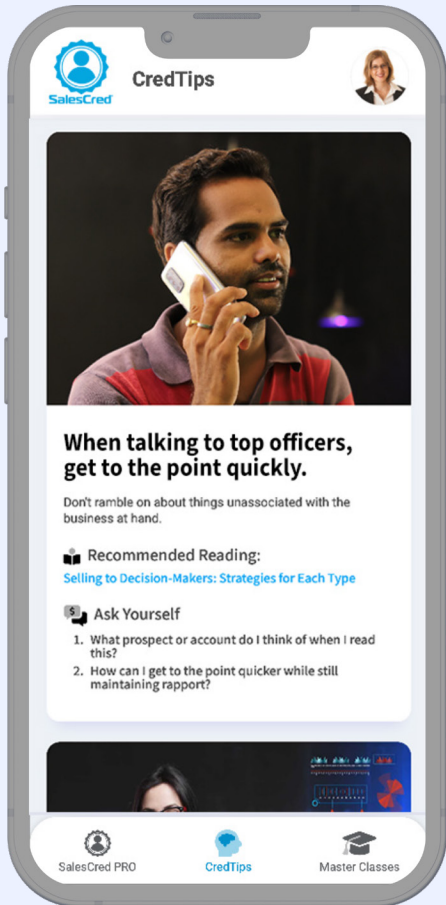
Your website must also be fully optimized to be responsive, intuitive and easily navigable. It won't hurt if you can make it mobile-friendly, too. Taking care of these aspects shows how thorough you are as an individual practitioner. It also conveys that you care about your prospective client's time, business and trust.



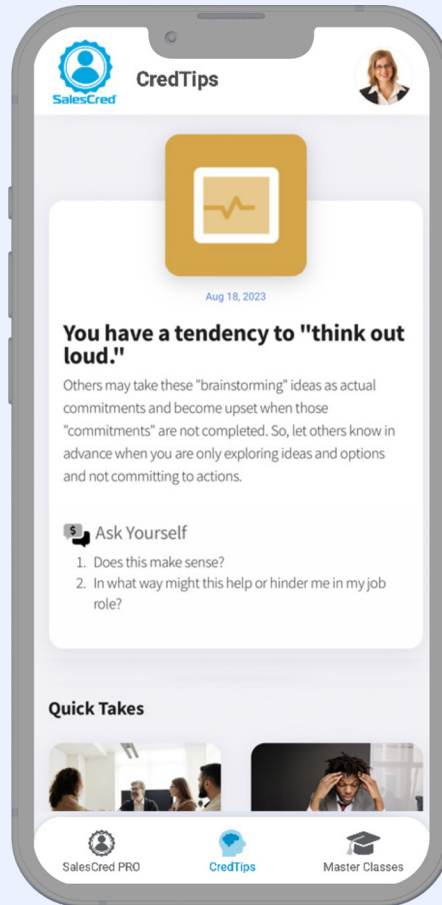
Ronald Robbins is the Founder & Chief Executive Officer at [Clicta Digital Agency](#) – a growth-driven digital marketing agency headquartered in Denver, Colorado. Establishing the company in 2017, Ron is a certified LGBT Business Enterprise and 1% for the Planet Business Member dedicated to diversity,

equity, and inclusion. He's also a firm believer in fighting for environmental causes while giving back to tackle the planet's most pressing environmental issues.

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One-Up and the Power of Authority

BY ANTHONY IANNARINO, AUTHOR, INTERNATIONAL SPEAKER, ENTREPRENEUR



Imagine you are a manager (who isn't in sales) and the results you are responsible for producing have become increasingly difficult to achieve. The Band-Aids you've used to keep things running are no longer adequate and, even though you don't particularly enjoy meeting with salespeople, you now need to take meetings with those who might help you turn things around.

Salesperson I

The first salesperson you meet is pleasant enough, and they work for a very large, reputable company. The company has called on you for years, and you believe their persistence has earned them the right to a meeting. The salesperson opens their laptop and produces a presentation about their company, their founder, their clients and testimonials, and their suite of products and services. So far, you have learned nothing that might improve your ability to produce the better results you need. Undeterred, you allow the salesperson to continue. The salesperson asks a lot of questions about the problem you are experiencing and how it is impacting your business. Because you need help, you answer all their questions

as best as you can. Then, the salesperson explains their company's "solution" is just the thing to help. You aren't certain, but you politely agree to meet again so the salesperson can present their proposal and solution.

Salesperson II

The second salesperson works for a smaller company with a good reputation. You know little about them, but other people seem to like them, even though you don't know why.

This salesperson asks if it would be all right if they shared a briefing about recent changes that are causing people in your role to struggle to get results that used to come more easily.

You agree to the briefing and find the information compelling—but more importantly, you understand why you have been experiencing problems and challenges for some time. You lean in and ask several questions to better understand your situation based on the briefing, and the salesperson provides you with greater clarity about what is working now and what isn't.

Up to this point, the salesperson has said nothing about their company or what they sell. They seem to already understand your problem better than you do, asking you questions that cause you to recognize why you're facing challenges, and addressing the implications. And they do this without having asked you about how the problem is harming your business.

During a couple meetings, the second salesperson explains the different ways to improve your results. Many of their recommendations relate to changes you need to make, no matter what or who you buy from. They also advise you as to the meetings you need to have and who needs to be there.

Because it's been more than a decade since you have made this kind of change, the advice is helpful. The salesperson also explains the different ways other companies address these problems, helping you better understand the decision you need to make.



One-Up and Authority

The One-Down salesperson finds themselves in their position because they have a transactional approach, one caused, in part, by the salesperson's need to borrow credibility from their company. Unfortunately for them, after more than 100 years, that strategy doesn't seem to move the needle anymore. Even though the One-Down salesperson's products and services are well-suited for the client, the salesperson did nothing to give the buyer a reason to prefer them over others.

The One-Up salesperson establishes their authority in the first meeting by providing a briefing that proves the salesperson has subject matter expertise and a deep understanding of the nature and root cause of client's problems and their implications for the contact and their company. The salesperson's questions cause the client to learn something about themselves, their problem, and how they should think about their situation.

The One-Up salesperson also provides advice and counsel about what is and isn't likely to work, explaining why different factors indicate that one way is better than some potential alternatives. They also share how different companies deliver results, and how to assess which approaches will be right for the client.

Without being asked, the salesperson explains what types of meetings the client would need to have to successfully change, and what changes the client needs to make outside of changing the solution and their supplier.

Top 3 attributes B2B buyers seek in salespeople who call on them:

- 1a. Responsive
- 1b. Knows my company/line of business
- 1c. Provides relevant insights and ideas to help my business

All within a half percentage point.

Voice of the B2B Buyer, salesfuel.com, July 2023.

Value Creator or Time Waster

The One-Down salesperson creates no value for the client who is trying to make sense of a decision they are rarely required to make. The One-Down approach didn't help the client understand anything other than the big company has a solution they are selling.

Why would a person buy from someone who doesn't seem to be an authority on their industry? Someone who doesn't seem to have any experience with the client's problems, challenges and what they should do to solve them?

A salesperson needs to have the authority to lead the buyer's journey. Doing so is part of solving the client's problem, as is the authority to advise the client on what factors to consider, and what approach will provide the best overall results.

The One-Up approach is built on establishing your authority, making it easier and safer for your client to decide if they would face greater difficulty and risk without the value the One-Up salesperson created during the sales conversation.

Elite Sales Strategies: A Guide to Being One-Up, Creating Value, and Becoming Truly Consultative will help you improve your approach and position you as an authority in your industry. It will also liberate you to share what you know with your clients, so you create more value than your One-Down competitors.



Anthony Iannarino is an American author, sales and leadership expert, and international keynote speaker. He is the author of six books on the modern sales approach, sales leadership, and The Negativity Fast. Anthony writes daily at thesalesblog.com, where he has published more than 5,000 articles on sales, business, leadership, social issues, and human culture. Born and educated in Columbus, Ohio, Anthony graduated from Capital University, Capital Law School, and Harvard Business School's Owner/President Management Program.



5 Ways to Build (and Lose) Credibility in Your Sales Emails

BY DARBY DOLL, GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS, SALESFUEL

Email doesn't seem to get any respect these days.

It's a necessary component of modern business that many people profess to despise. Others question its effectiveness as a sales tool – much less for building relationships with people.

Like it or not, email can be a powerful tool for building (or losing) credibility in business.

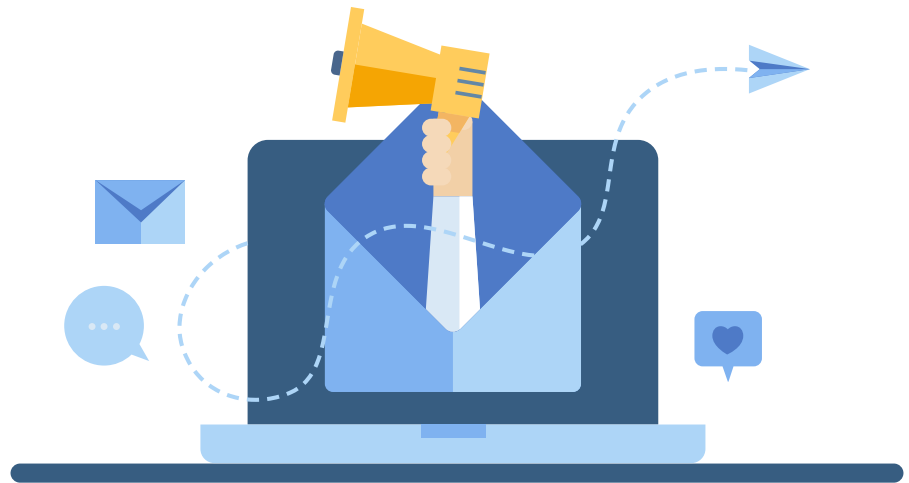
Here are five tips for building sales credibility with email.

1. The most important part of an email is not the subject line

While it's true that good subject lines are critical (see tip #3), the subject line isn't what people typically read first. The FROM line is the focus as people scan their inbox and decide what to open.

Let's say you open your inbox in the morning and scan your emails. You've got a bunch of emails but your boss's name pops out at you. Suddenly those other emails aren't so important no matter how clever their subject lines are.

While you can't compete with someone's boss, there are steps we can take to enhance our credibility in the FROM line. Mainly, use your full name and a company email address, not a personal email like Gmail.



2. Make it personal and show them you know them

Again, before we get to subject lines, know who you are emailing. Too many salespeople get excited about having lists of contacts that they can fire a bunch of emails at.

But remember: **Spam = credibility killer.**

Your competition may be relying too heavily on email templates that they send out to everyone. Separate yourself from every other salesperson by making your sales emails to top prospects personal, not just personalized.

Of course, you should only be emailing people who are relevant to your business, solutions and products. But you should also segment your contacts – by position or job title, by seniority, by generation (e.g. Gen Z, millennials, Gen X, boomers), and by business challenge. And tailor your message directly to that person and their personality. Your signature section is also critical

territory. Including a professional headshot photo can build credibility by showing that you're a real respectable person instead of a random nobody they should avoid.

3. Subject lines – don't try to be too clever

Ok, let's talk subject lines. There is no shortage of blogs and articles on the internet that will advise you to craft a clever, attention-grabbing subject to hook the recipient into opening the email and reading on.

Good advice – the problem is that some emailers try to get too clever by:

- Being cryptic: "You'll never guess why I'm emailing you"
- Adopting an informal or too familiar tone: "Hey there" or "How have you been?"
- Using clickbait: "Re: project updates" or "You won't believe this"



The jury is still out on whether including emojis in a subject line is a good idea. If you're emailing someone who is Gen Z or if it's product-appropriate, it might work, but some recipients might view it as unprofessional or even as spam and avoid opening your email.

Suffice it to say, again, think of your audience. You should know who you're emailing, and you'll gain credibility when your subject line communicates that you can help them in a way that they need.

4. No joking around

Some sales pros can't help trying to inject humor into their emails. Humor can work, but primarily with people you already know and who know you.

The problem is that email cannot convey tone or intent like you can in person, so humor can backfire. The recipient may not find your attempt funny or they may even be offended.

Also avoid jargon and buzzwords, as these can come across as insincere

or confusing. Technical terms and abbreviations may be appropriate if you're communicating with peers in your industry, but may confuse a broader audience. Buzzwords like "synergy" or "seamless" and tired clichés like "at the end of the day" can cause people's eyes to roll.

Know that hyperbole like "the answer to all your problems" often backfires, as people are skeptical about fanciful claims. Exaggeration immediately diminishes your credibility.

5. Most Importantly, Provide Value

You're selling to busy decision-makers with less time than money, so get to the point! Eliminate wind-up phrases like "I hope this email finds you well" or "Just following up."

In the subject line, in your first sentence and in your call-to-action, make it clear that you understand the challenges the recipient faces and/or the need they have.

Speak directly to the recipient, making it more about them than about you. And make every effort to provide value by helping them with useful content and solutions to their problems.

If your email includes links or attachments, always double-check to make sure links go to the right pages and attachments are actually attached. Keep in mind that too many links can land you in the recipient's junk folder – meaning your email will never be seen, much less read.

Lastly, know when not to send an email. If you find yourself writing a long email scrap it and pick up the phone or schedule a video chat. If you must convey bad news, express empathy, or discuss a complex topic, use your voice instead. This reduces the chances of misunderstanding – and demonstrating you truly care about them can be the greatest value of all.

By using these approaches, your sales email will boost your credibility with your customers instead of diminishing it.



Based in Asia, Darby leads global business development and partnership activities for SalesFuel. He has two decades' experience working with multinationals and startups in several countries. He began his career as a

journalist in Taiwan and is proficient in Mandarin Chinese.



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BY AUDREY STRONG, VICE PRESIDENT OF COMMUNICATIONS, SALESFUEL

It's 3:30 a.m. and my public relations client, an aerobatic air show pilot, is heading out in the black of night onto the air show tarmac to get his plane out for a morning show live shot, the first of 10 media interviews I've booked for him today in Portland, Oregon.

My phone rings.

"Hi Elias—Good morning!"

There's a long pause. He's a seasoned media pro, a very good interviewee and knows how this all works. But he doesn't talk.

"Elias? Hello? Can you hear me?"

"Oh yeah, I'm sorry. You surprised the hell out of me. I was just expecting to get a voicemail. But you're up!"

"Of course, I'm up! You're working the media tour and when you're working, I'm working!"

"Audrey, no one does that in PR. Nobody has ever worked outside regular hours with all the other PR people I've hired."

It saddened me that that was his experience up until he worked with me and my independent little PR firm. Why was I up? Because all kinds of things can get changed in real time in a media tour and that morning, that's exactly what happened. KOIN-TV had breaking news and diverted his live truck crew from our pilot and the morning show to that assignment. I called the TV newsroom's assignment desk and rebooked a shoot for later that morning to save the interview and re-secure the coverage. Problem solved!

But I learned a valuable lesson about service levels that became my lynchpin of business model and I'm quite certain is the reason why my PR business was

all referral for a solid 10 years. I never had to go out and get business. Elias was a CEO-to-CEO referral. He later shared with me that the client who referred him said I gave amazing results with superb service levels and reasonable rates. I love all of that. (Except the reasonable rates part LOL.)

Heed the lesson that if you don't have an awareness of service levels and aren't paying attention to them in both your internal and external interactions with colleagues and clients/customers, you're behind a competitor. Right now, higher service levels are more noticeable, in part because so much automation, technology and less personalization of processes is happening.

Before you start squawking about extra costs of any of this, implementing new processes and policies surrounding it, go back to my story. What did it cost me to surprise and delight my client? Getting out of bed (free) and making myself a cup of coffee (\$1.25). What do people sometimes say when delighted in a situation? "Wow, it's the little things."

What this level of service accomplishes is not so little. It maximizes your credibility with your client about your business and skills. It takes time to learn each client's business, KPIs and other important information. You can earn their credibility much more quickly, and lose it just as quickly. This media tour could have been cancelled that day had I not been up managing every detail. I would have left a client stranded in the wee hours sitting there with nothing to do.

What's the end result? Zero credibility means your client will not be comfortable recommending you to his super successful peer group CEOs, who may also be looking for someone like you. You lose to a competitor.

You should apply this mindset to how you interact with colleagues or other departments, even external vendors in your work life. Go beyond, be agreeable, be cheerful.



Understand that helping someone who is asking for your assistance goes a long way, particularly when the shoe is on the other foot. At SalesFuel, there's a lot of push/pull of materials and content among departments and it's a pleasure to service my co-workers daily. I basically view them as internal clients, who should be serviced just as much as an external paying client or an end client brought to me by another PR agency who needs more labor on an account. Whether you are delivering a work product or leading a meeting, providing data and results, think about new, higher-level ways of delivering and what is meaningful to that client.

Here are my top takeaways for you so you can apply this to your role as leader, manager, account manager and co-worker. If you're consistent in applying these, you'll stand out from the competition.



Anticipate your clients' and colleagues' needs. Stay ahead of the curve, send things early, think through scenarios on execution that could cause issues, be mindful and curious about what clients and colleagues may need and ask questions. And maintain internal and external services at the same level always. It's easier that way anyway!

Match your methods of servicing to mirror the client. If you have a client that is enamored with data, or who is pressured by their own management to support their statements with data, find new ways to give them more data and detail in your reports than they've ever

had. Other clients have a culture at their organization that is very relaxed and people forward? You could do something as simple as an icebreaker exercise built into your agendas for the meetings you're leading with them. Be different and thoughtful and they will notice.

Small and Simple is mega powerful. I recently sent a handwritten message in a greeting card snail mail to a stakeholder, and she said, "I so loved getting that. It's sitting on my desk. I see it every day." Be present in real time and available when a client calls or messages and answer promptly in real time.

Be Competitive with yourself. Technology gives us new ways to delight and surprise so be a lifelong learner and identify fun ways to reach out to service your clients. I had one client who loved WhatsApp and exclusively preferred to communicate with me on it exclusively.

As new, easier ways emerge to communicate or pass paperwork back and forth, or scan documents – use them. Suggest new apps or portals to your clients they may not be familiar with. It's also a great touchpoint to speak with them and provide value.

Apply these tips to provide exceptional service that will give your customer a reason to keep coming back.



Audrey Strong is Vice President of Communications at SalesFuel. She leads all marketing and communications, including public relations – which she has directed since 2014. Prior to SalesFuel, Audrey ran her own public relations firm and has an extensive background as an award-winning television news reporter and anchor in Denver, Chicago, Honolulu and other markets.



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The Secret to Getting All the Referrals You Could Ever Hope For

BY JEFFREY GITOMER, AUTHOR, SPEAKER

Everyone in management will tell every salesperson to “ask for referrals” or “don’t forget to ask for referrals” or worse, “as soon as you make the sale, ask for a referral.”

These strategies are not only wrong, they also jeopardize the future of the relationship.

First of all, why are you “asking” (begging) for a referral?

Second of all, why are you asking when you haven’t earned anything?

REALITY: Asking for referrals makes everyone feel awkward. And usually results in a turndown, or a delay. A frustrating delay that goes on for months.

REALITY: A referral is the second strongest lead in sales. The first is an unsolicited one.

MAJOR CLUE: Referrals are not asked for – referrals are earned.

SCENARIO: You get a referral from a customer without asking for it. You make a sale. Your boss asks you, “How’d you get that referral?” And you respond, “I earned it.” Your boss will not know what to say next.

Give to get.

There are all kinds of names applied to the process of “giving” a referral to a customer. Pay it forward. Unsolicited. But the salesperson will forever live in darkness if he or she expects something in return.



Which brings me to this prime example of what not to do. I got this email “request for an answer” today:

Hey Jeff, I can't seem to ever get any referrals! I go back to the customer after the sale, I give them an appreciation gift, and ask them for some people, and they say they don't know anybody or don't think anybody else can afford it?! What to do?

The guy didn’t even sign the email.

That’s a good start to not getting referrals. Thank value. Not Candy. This guy thinks by bringing candy that he deserves a referral. And his email proves my point. He will never get referrals this way – and neither will you.

What is this guy’s business logic and value message behind his actions? And what’s yours? Asking for referrals is not only a poor practice, it’s also rude and embarrassing.

NOTE WELL: There are those who claim expertise in the referral process that will differ in opinion. Take their advice and end up like the anonymous emailer above – empty.

I will admit my strategy is harder to perform. Good. That way the lazy salespeople will not be in competition. And you may actually get some referrals this way. Five referrals out of a hundred tries. But the other 95 people will avoid you forever. Not good.

Ask yourself:

- *What have I earned so far?*
- *Have I done anything besides make a sale?*
- *Have I provided any value beyond the sale?*
- *Have I done anything memorable?*
- *On a scale of 1-10, how strong is this relationship?*
- *If I asked for a referral right now would it be or feel awkward?*
- *Why would this customer give me a referral?*

NOTE: If you can't think of a reason, neither can your customer.

Then ask yourself:

- *What can I do that will get me from where I am to where I want to be?*
- *Do I have a real referral game plan beyond "asking"?*
- *What are the value actions I need to be (consistently) taking to begin earning referrals?*

The questions above are the ones that need to be asked before you take any referral actions.

Here are the TOP 6.5 referral earning strategies:

1. Deliver memorable service.

It's simple. Be friendly and helpful, and give positive response. Do something that surprises the customer in a positive way.

2. Be available.

Make it easy to do business with you and anyone else in your company 24/7/365.

3. Be a consistent value provider.

Create an email magazine or blog with content that helps customers, and a business Facebook page where you post positive and helpful information and good news, and allow for customer interactions. Video if you can.

4. GIVE a referral to the customer.

This requires work, but it's a great way to prove your worth.



5. Get them one LinkedIn contact they can benefit from.

See if any of your connections could be of value to your customers, and make connections.

6. Develop the relationship slowly over time.

Create your long-term value plan, and execute it consistently. Always post a "thank you" for referred business.

6.5 Don't ask for a referral if you have earned one.

There's an underlying powerful message in what I'm saying here. It's about having a philosophy of giving, without the expectation of getting anything in return.

This philosophy, if adopted, will give you a lifetime of fulfillment without an ounce of regret, remorse or resentment.

Give to give. Don't give to get.

Nearly 4 of 10 B2B buyers are more likely to take a call or meeting from a salesperson if their name has been referred to them by someone they trust.

Voice of the B2B Buyer, salesfuel.com, July 2023.



Gitomer Defined (git-o-mer) n.

1. a creative, on-the-edge, writer and speaker whose expertise on sales, customer loyalty, and personal development is world renowned. 2. known for presentations, seminars and keynote addresses that are funny, insightful, and in your face. 3. real world. 4. off the wall. 5. on the money. 6. gives audiences information they can take out in the street one minute after the seminar is over and turn it into money. He is the ruling King of Sales. See also: salesman.

Jeffrey Gitomer is the author of 17 best-selling books including *The Sales Bible* and *The Little Red Book of Selling*. All of Jeffrey's sales and personal development training programs, including his coaching program and a sales skills assessment, are available at Gitomer.com.



How Credible are You?

ASSIGN YOURSELF ONE OF THESE THREE POINT VALUES ONLY:

ALWAYS: 5 POINTS	SOMETIMES: 2 POINTS	I DON'T KNOW/ DON'T THINK SO: 0 POINTS	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. I can describe why others customers in the buyer's industry buy from me in 15 words or less
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. I am prepared to deliver new insight, information or ideas before every sales call or meeting
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. I respond to buyers' questions, concerns and requests in less than one business day
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Buyers learn new things about themselves or their business when they work with me
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. C-suite level decision-makers feel comfortable sharing sensitive information with me
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. I invest my own time and money to improve my sales skills and soft skills
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	7. I deliver MORE than I promise
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	8. I put the buyer's best interests ahead of my own
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	9. I am consulted by my customers before they make a significant decision not related to the product I sell
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	10. When someone Googles my name, they find positive things about me on the first page of search results
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	11. My LinkedIn and other online profiles will convince prospects why they should do business with me
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	12. I write articles, blog posts and post videos online that demonstrate my expertise
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	13. My sales emails are written specifically for each buyer and are responded to most of the time
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	14. I avoid speaking in a manner than is unsure, uninformed or unkind
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15. I generate most of my sales leads from referrals and introductions from my current clients

TOTAL

ASSUMING YOU OPERATE WITH A HIGH DEGREE OF TRUTHFULNESS AND AUTHENTICITY...

65 POINTS AND UP: You are likely perceived as credible by most of your prospects and accounts. Keep it up!

40-64 POINTS: You can improve your perception by more prospects, and improve your sales numbers, with a little work. SalesCred can help.

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